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London Papers Trace Philby's Rise In British Intelligence as Soviet Spy

Special to The Washington Post

LONDON, Sept. 30—The London Observer and the London Sunday Times tonight revealed what both claimed were "exclusive" details of the career of Harold Philby, a Soviet spy who penetrated the "very heart" of British intelligence.

Philby, who fled to Moscow from Beirut in 1963, was recruited into the Soviet spy system in 1933, at age 22 and, according to the Sunday Times, was given only one job—to penetrate British intelligence.

This Philby did in 1941 after serving as a correspondent for the London Times in Spain and as a minor official in several secret departments of the British government.

During World War II, his position in the Intelligence Service (known as MI-6) grew to such an extent that he was at one time tipped as a possible future chief of the Service.

In 1944, say the two papers, Philby was selected to head a new section of MI-6 devoted to counter Soviet espionage activities, the Sunday Times reports, and his unsuspecting British superiors even gave him permission to play the part of a double agent with Russians.

In 1949, Philby was sent to Washington to serve as British liaison with the CIA and FBI. When the Russians exploded their first atomic bomb in 1949, the Observer says, Philby and his staff worked day and night for four days coding and decoding and transmitting vital British and American exchanges.

Philby's career came to a halt in 1951 when two of his closest colleagues, Guy D. Burgess and Donald MacLean, fled to Russia. He was ordered to return to London for a secret trial where, says the

Times, "he defended himself brilliantly." Burgess died in 1963.

In 1955, Philby was publicly cleared by Prime Minister Harold MacMillan and a year later the Observer, acting on the assurance that Philby was no longer a government agent, sent him to Beirut as their Middle East correspondent. But, the two papers say, Philby had never been taken off the government payroll and hoped to work his way back into the Intelligence Service.

In late 1961, however, information became available (the Observer says from a Soviet defector; the Sunday Times says from counterspy George Blake) that made it impossible for Philby to deny he was a Soviet agent. At the end, says the Observer, Philby admitted to seeing his contact in the Russian Embassy once a month.

On Jan. 23, 1963, he fled, and says the Observer, "British authorities either would not, or could not stop him."

MORI/CDF